THE ROAD AHEAD
MIDDLE EAST POLICY IN
THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION’S
SECOND TERM

PLANNING PAPERS FROM THE
SABAN CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY
AT THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

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1775 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036
www.brookings.edu

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The Road Ahead:
Middle East Policy in the Bush Administration's Second Term
may be ordered from:
Brookings Institution Press
1775 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.,
Washington, D.C. 20036
Tel. 1-800/275-1447 or 202/797-6258
Fax: 202/797-2960
www.bookstore.brookings.edu

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data are available

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INTRODUCTION: BUSH AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Flynt Leverett

Confronting a terrorist threat that struck the American homeland on September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush responded by laying out a bold foreign policy and national security strategy with few precedents in the modern record of American diplomacy. To deal with the threat of global terror, Bush did not explore a reconfiguration of the global balance of power, as, in very different ways, his father had at the end of the Cold War and Richard Nixon had in the early 1970s. Bush did not propose the creation of a new network of alliances, as Harry Truman did at the outset of the Cold War. Likewise, Bush did not call for the development of new international institutions or a system of collective security, as Franklin Roosevelt had envisioned rising out of the rubble and ashes of World War II.

Rather, facing the defining challenge of his presidency, Bush developed and pursued a policy approach that can be described as Wilsonian (or, perhaps, Reaganesque) in its ambition to secure America by changing the political orientation of states in far-flung parts of the globe. As this ambitious agenda took shape, it became increasingly clear that President Bush’s approach to securing American interests in the post-9/11 world was focused primarily on the Middle East, defined broadly to include important non-Arab states in the Muslim world, such as Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey.

AN AMBITIOUS AGENDA

Speaking just nine days after the September 11 attacks, the president declared war not simply on Usama bin Ladin and the jihadists that had struck the United States, but on all terrorism “with global reach.” In the process, Bush articulated a maximalist vision for victory in that struggle. The United States would not content itself with destroying terrorist cells and organizations around the world; those states that, in Washington’s view, support terrorist activity would have to choose whether they stood with the civilized world or with the terrorists.

In the fall of 2001, the United States launched a military campaign to unseat the Taliban regime in Afghanistan that had given bin Ladin and his followers safe haven, as well as to root out the al-Qa’ida leadership from its sanctuaries there. But it was not clear, at the outset of Operation Enduring Freedom, whether the United States was acting primarily to eliminate a specific terrorist threat through a “decapitation” strategy against al-Qa’ida or to launch a sustained
campaign to remake the Arab and Muslim worlds—in terms of both the strategic balance in the broader Middle East and prevailing models of governance across the region.

In the early stages of the war on terror, the fight against al-Qa’ida provided the impetus for a dramatic upturn in counterterrorism cooperation between the United States and governments around the world. The struggle against al-Qa’ida and related groups also prompted an unprecedented degree of official U.S. engagement with the problems of public diplomacy toward the Muslim world, with the aim of undercutting the appeal of Islamist extremism.

But President Bush's maximalist aspirations became increasingly apparent as the war progressed. In particular, the president broadened the focus of the war on terror to encompass an entire category of “rogue” regimes. In his January 2002 State of the Union address, Bush underscored his concern about those state sponsors of terrorism that were simultaneously pursuing weapons of mass destruction (WMD)—especially nuclear weapons—and oppressing their own peoples. Three such states—Iran, Iraq, and North Korea—were enshrined in the address as members of an “axis of evil.” A prospective link between ties to terrorist groups and pursuit of WMD capabilities was subsequently adduced by the Administration to justify military intervention to unseat Saddam Hussein’s regime in Baghdad—a regime that had no demonstrable involvement in the September 11 attacks and, as the U.S. Intelligence Community argued at the time and the 9/11 Commission concluded in retrospect, no meaningful operational ties to al-Qa’ida.

In the months that followed the 9/11 attacks, Bush also made clear that he was determined to address what he considered the root causes of the terrorist threat confronting the United States and its democratic allies—as the president sometimes put it, to “drain the swamp” in which terrorist recruits were bred. The president proposed to do this by nothing short of remaking the Arab and Muslim worlds. As the president’s 2002 National Security Strategy operationalized this idea, the United States would strive to diminish “the underlying conditions that spawn terrorism by enlisting the international community to focus its efforts and resources on areas most at risk” and by “supporting moderate and modern government, especially in the Muslim world, to ensure that the conditions and ideologies that promote terrorism do not find fertile ground in any nation.”

Bush’s transformative agenda for what would come to be called the broader Middle East had at least two foundational aspects. First, with regard to regional conflicts, the president embraced a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict more fully than any of his predecessors. In contrast to President Clinton, who publicly endorsed the notion of Palestinian statehood only during his last month in office and as an “idea” that would be taken off the table at the end of his term, Bush made the establishment of a Palestinian state a high-profile element of his Administration’s declaratory foreign policy, laying out his position in clear language before the United Nations General Assembly in November 2001. (Indeed, one of the president’s undeniable achievements in the Arab-Israeli arena has been to normalize discussion of Palestinian statehood in the United States and in Israel.)

Second, Bush articulated a vision of democratic and market-oriented reform for the Arab and Muslim worlds, ascribing a higher priority to promoting positive internal change in Middle Eastern countries than any of his predecessors. To implement this vision, the president proposed a number of important policy initiatives, including a Middle East Trade Initiative aimed at the eventual creation of a Middle East Free Trade Area and a Greater Middle East Initiative for reform, which, in collaboration with the G-8,
became the Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative.

The president also linked his quest for democratization in the Arab and Muslim worlds to his policy approaches for Iraq and the creation of a Palestinian state. Bush has repeatedly argued that the establishment of a democratic Iraq, “in the heart of the Middle East,” would have a transformative effect across the region. Similarly, he has argued that the establishment of a democratically legitimated Palestinian leadership free from the taint of corruption and terror is essential to achieving a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As the president embarked on his second term in office, he reaffirmed his commitment to this transformative agenda. In his second inaugural address, Bush noted that “as long as whole regions of the world simmer in resentment and tyranny—prone to ideologies that feed hatred and excuse murder—violence will gather, and multiply in destructive power, and cross the most defended borders, and raise a mortal threat.” There is, Bush argued, “only one force in history that can break the reign of hatred and resentment, and expose the pretensions of tyrants, and reward the hopes of the decent and tolerant, and that is the force of human freedom.” On the basis of this analysis, Bush declared, “It is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.”

A REGION IN THE BALANCE

From this review, it is clear that Bush’s stewardship of the war on terror and his foreign policy more generally will be judged primarily by their efficacy and impact in the Middle East. It is also clear that, at this writing, the success or failure of the Administration’s policies in that essential region hangs very much in the balance.

In the essays that follow, the fellows of the Brookings Institution’s Saban Center for Middle East Policy (along with James Steinberg, vice-president and director of Foreign Policy Studies at Brookings) offer their recommendations as to how the Bush Administration might yet complete the ambitious agenda it has defined for itself in the broader Middle East. Some of the authors might not agree with all of the arguments advanced in pieces composed by their colleagues. Nevertheless, all of the essays start with some common analytic judgments about the Bush Administration’s first-term foreign policy record and some common assumptions about how best to move forward.

One of the principal assessments animating all the essays is that the Bush Administration’s handling of the core policy challenges in the Middle East has been suboptimal, at best. On multiple fronts—the fight against terror rooted in Islamist extremism, post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction in Iraq, and dealing with the threat posed by other regional rogues (such as Iran and Syria)—current trends are not positive; a straight-line continuation of the status quo on these issues could well prove disastrous for U.S. interests in the region.

The Administration’s difficulties in prosecuting the global war on terror illustrate well this basic point. The “war on terror” may have been the single most important conceptual and rhetorical framework shaping President Bush’s foreign policy during his first term, but, within a few months after the 9/11 attacks, this framework had begun to lose its focus as a framing device for policy.

In particular, the decision to prepare for and, ultimately, to launch Operation Iraqi Freedom was never accepted as an integral part of the war on terror by large parts of the international community. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the United States had the support of virtually the
entire international community for a military campaign to unseat the Taliban in Afghanistan and for other actions to eliminate the threat of further attacks by al-Qa’ida. By shifting its focus to Iraq, where the justification for urgent, forcible regime change was perceived in many quarters as less clear cut, the Bush Administration lost a significant measure of that support. And, as Iraq became ever more the centerpiece of the Administration’s game plan for the war on terror, the effectiveness of its “decapitation” strategy against al-Qa’ida started to decline.

This created a “breathing space” within which the nature of the jihadist threat began to shift. Over the last three years, al-Qa’ida has become a relatively small component of an increasingly diffuse global jihadist movement. This global movement consists of numerous groups, in dozens of countries, which are often described as “al-Qa’ida affiliates.” For many of these groups, al-Qa’ida serves primarily as a source of ideological inspiration rather than operational guidance or material support. As some observers have put it, in the broad context of the global jihadist activity, al-Qa’ida has been replaced by “al-Qa’ida-ism.”

This transformed threat is potentially more dangerous than the one posed by the original al-Qa’ida because, as former White House counterterrorism adviser Richard Clarke has written, it is “simultaneously more decentralized and more radical.” Al-Qa’ida has become, in the words of French scholar Gilles Kepel, a “terrorist NGO,” without “real estate to be occupied, military hardware to be destroyed, and a regime to be overthrown.” A “decapitation” strategy focusing on the elimination of a small group of senior figures in the original al-Qa’ida network is no longer an adequate or appropriate strategy for dealing with a jihadist threat that has, metaphorically speaking, metastasized.

It has also become increasingly clear that the United States is, in many ways, losing the battle for “hearts and minds” in the Arab and Muslim worlds. In the aftermath of the Iraq campaign, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld himself asked, in a leaked October 2003 memo, whether U.S. efforts might in fact be facilitating the enlargement of jihadist ranks. The National Intelligence Council concluded, in a recent unclassified report, that, more than three years into the Bush Administration’s war on terror, “the key factors that spawned international terrorism show no signs of abating over the next 15 years…. Foreign jihadists—individuals ready to fight anywhere they believe Muslim lands are under attack by what they see as ‘infidel invaders’—enjoy a growing sense of support from Muslims who are not necessarily supporters of terrorism.”

Thus, current policy for prosecuting the war on terror is badly in need of repair. A similar imperative for course correction is evident in the Bush Administration’s handling of post-Saddam Iraq. The military campaign to unseat Saddam Hussein and establish democratic government in Iraq was the signature foreign-policy initiative of the Administration’s first term; it is certainly the most controversial single step taken to date by President Bush and, arguably, the one with the most attendant risks.

As the president enters his second term, many of those risks seem very much in play, and the ultimate outcome of the American effort to lay the...
foundations for a stable and democratic post-Saddam political order remains very much in doubt. Even supporters of the president’s decision to launch Operation Iraqi Freedom, such as Thomas Friedman and William Kristol, have bemoaned what they see as the Administration’s serial mistakes in handling the post-conflict period.

The consequences of U.S. policy failure in Iraq would be profound, indeed. Continuing instability in Iraq is already making the country a developmental arena providing “recruitment, training grounds, technical skills and language proficiency for a new class of terrorists”; an Iraq from which the United States had to depart without consolidating minimal order would be even more of a terrorist enclave. An anarchical Iraq would very likely collapse into civil war, threatening the stability of neighboring countries and inviting their intervention. Given these stakes, it is critical that the United States get Iraq right, but that is likely to require some significant departures from the current approach.

As it enters its second term, the Bush Administration must also face up to its lack of an effective strategy for dealing with state sponsors of terror that are simultaneously pursuing WMD capabilities; this deficit is especially problematic with regard to Iran and its nuclear ambitions. During its first term, the president and his senior advisers pursued two alternative approaches to dealing with this kind of “rogue” regime in the context of the war on terror.

To confront the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the President and his senior advisers opted for a strategy of coercive regime change. In the case of Libya, however, the Administration picked up on a process of conditional engagement with the regime of Mu’ammar al-Qaddafi that had begun during the Clinton Administration. Conditional engagement helped to persuade Libya to meet its international obligations arising from the December 1988 bombing of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland and helped set the stage for successful U.S. engagement with Tripoli over weapons of mass destruction.

The Administration has so far not developed a coherent approach to dealing with other regional rogues—most notably, Iran and Syria. The president and his senior advisers have been loath to engage in a process of conditional engagement with the current regimes in Tehran and Damascus. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, both Iran and Syria sought to cooperate with the United States in various ways, clearly wishing not to get caught on the wrong side of a U.S.-led war on global terrorism. However, the president and his national security team resisted anything more than limited tactical cooperation with these regimes, arguing that broader engagement would be an unwarranted concession and a reward for bad behavior. The Administration’s willingness to try conditional engagement with Libya remains, at this point, an exception to its publicly stated reluctance to negotiate the rehabilitation of rogue states.

The Administration has not been able to develop efficacious options for coercing change in problematic Iranian and Syrian behaviors. The ongoing costs—material and otherwise—of U.S. involvement in Iraq mean that the Administration has had no option for pursuing coercive regime change in either Iran or Syria. Similarly, the United States has virtually no options for unilaterally increasing economic pressures on Tehran or Damascus.

Without many coercive unilateral policy options and with the President resistant to engagement

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5 Ibid.
with regimes he considers fundamentally illegitimate, the possibilities for crafting an effective strategy for dealing with problematic Iranian and Syrian behaviors were severely limited during the Administration’s first term. This must change, particularly with regard to Iran, if the United States is to avoid significant reverses in its regional position during President Bush’s second term.

For other important components of America’s Middle East policy—encouraging Arab-Israeli peacemaking, for example, or managing important bilateral relationships with key regional partners such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia—the Bush Administration’s first-term approach is, if not courting disaster, at least permitting important U.S. interests to drift in ways that, over time, could prove strategically dysfunctional. In these areas, as well, the means by which the Administration pursues its policy goals must be chosen with a more acute appreciation of the strategic realities facing the United States.

A second assessment shared by the authors of the essays that follow is that President Bush’s emphasis on regional transformation and reform has been insufficiently nuanced and presented and pursued in ways that have fostered doubts about American credibility and raised questions about the Administration’s policy priorities. In Bush’s first term, far-reaching presidential rhetoric shone a spotlight on the issue of reform, especially political reform. Bush’s use of the bully pulpit placed pressure on Arab regimes to look responsive and lent a degree of cover to some Arab activists, but it also produced a certain degree of backlash in the region.

Unfortunately, the president’s high-minded sentiments were matched neither by appropriately large-scale programmatic activities nor by consistent diplomacy. This gap created perceptions, especially in the region, that the president and his senior advisers were stymied by the tradeoffs associated with promoting greater openness in states where the United States has important strategic interests and that the ultimate drivers for U.S. policy remained support for Israel and narrow economic concerns, with perhaps an increased admixture of ideological hostility to Arab and Muslim interests.

Being serious about reform means that the promotion of positive change and liberalization must be grounded in an appreciation of the full range of American interests at stake. There is, of course, a powerful “realist” argument for making the promotion of reform a more salient component of America’s Middle East policy. It is difficult to see how states like Egypt or Saudi Arabia will be able to sustain their strategic cooperation with the United States in the medium-to-long term without recasting the basic compact between rulers and ruled in those societies. Within such a realist framework, the tradeoffs involved in promoting greater openness can and should be forthrightly acknowledged.

The example of Algeria’s aborted 1992 elections stands as the nightmare vision for American policymakers of what democracy might bring to the Arab world: legitimately elected Islamist governments that are anti-American, and ultimately anti-democratic, in orientation. More generally, broad American pressure for political change may end up being an entry point for extremism and instability, and may even increase the likelihood of outcomes that are detrimental to our interests.

In addition, pressuring friendly Arab regimes to democratize may come at the price of their cooperation on other matters of interest to the United States. For example, it is certainly true that the negotiation of peace treaties with Israel would have been more complicated, perhaps impossible, with democracies in Egypt and Jordan.
Would the United States be able to persuade a fully democratized Egypt or Saudi Arabia to extend the necessary degree of counterterrorism and security cooperation for Washington to prosecute an effective war on terror?

Ultimately, the encouragement of reform in the broader Middle East must be thought through and pursued on a country-by-country basis, with policies developed and tailored to the specific circumstances of each country. Reform may be an imperative for the region, but the manner in which reform is implemented needs to be adapted to the unique circumstances of individual countries and what the United States needs from these countries. In these complex calculations, the avoidance of tradeoffs against near-term U.S. interests should be considered in tandem with an accounting of the medium-to-long term risks of inaction.

This sort of balance eluded the Bush Administration during its first term. Finding it is clearly not an easy task; the authors of the essays that follow are not in complete agreement how to do it, particularly for countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia with which the United States has long-standing strategic partnerships. Among those addressing aspects of this problem in their essays, Shibley Telhami, James Steinberg, and Flynt Leverett argue that, in such cases, an early emphasis on economic reform, improvement of human rights performance, and guided liberalization in the political sphere is the most effective and prudent course. Tamara Cofman Wittes, on the other hand, argues that such a strategy is insufficient to secure the broad range of U.S. interests in the region; instead, the United States needs to be prepared to apply top-down pressure for broad political liberalization alongside these other efforts. Nevertheless, all the authors agree that the president and his senior advisers need to find the right balance between the near-term costs of encouraging reform and the medium-to-long-term risks of inaction.

Another important assessment linking all of the essays is a sense that not only does the Bush approach to particular components of its Middle East policy have significant deficiencies, but that the president and his senior advisers have compartmentalized these various components in ways that have undercut the overall effectiveness of their policy and weakened the U.S. posture in the region. A number of examples could be adduced to demonstrate this point, but the case of Iraq policy seems particularly apposite. Many commentators have observed that, at this point, the most immediate priority of President Bush’s broader Middle East strategy must be Iraq. The Administration must find a way to reduce its burdens in Iraq without paving the way for chaos in that critical country if other parts of the president’s Middle East policy are to have a chance of working.

As Iraq has become both a magnet for jihadists who want to fight America and a cause célèbre that boosts recruitment and support for extremist groups elsewhere, it is hard to see how the United States can turn the corner in the global war on terror until Iraq has been defused as an issue for Islamic radicals. Furthermore, the current level of American military and logistical commitment in Iraq has reduced the range of actionable policy options for dealing with other problem states in the region, such as Iran. American difficulties in the post-conflict period have also hampered the Administration’s efforts to encourage economic and political reform in the region by allowing entrenched regimes to argue that the alternative to authoritarianism is not orderly change but chaotic instability.

Thus, unless the United States stabilizes the situation in Iraq and puts that country on a credible path toward the extension of a legitimate, representative Iraqi government’s authority over all Iraq, the chances for achieving anything else in the Middle East will be seriously hampered. But
it is equally the case that the prospects for stabilizing Iraq would be significantly enhanced if that objective were made part of a broader regional strategy. In this broader strategy, positive results in other areas would help to reinforce progress in Iraq and vice versa.

To achieve such a symbiosis, the Bush Administration will, in its second term, need to develop an integrated Middle East strategy with at least eight branches:

1. Refocusing the war on terror.
2. Restoring America’s standing in the Arab and Muslim worlds.
3. Encouraging political, economic, and social reform in the Arab and Muslim worlds.
4. Promoting a comprehensive Middle East peace (including Syria and Lebanon).
5. Stabilizing Iraq.
6. Denying Iran nuclear weapons and neutralizing its use of terror against peacemaking efforts in the Arab-Israeli arena.
7. Ending Syria’s support for terrorism and eliciting greater Syrian cooperation with U.S. regional objectives.
8. Rolling back the jihadist threat in Saudi Arabia and securing America’s energy interests in the Persian Gulf.

An integrated approach not only increases the chances of promoting progress on all eight tracks but also improves the prospects for achieving a priority identified during the presidential campaign: strengthening alliances and utilizing them to ease the burden of American leadership. For example, European and Arab leaders all insist that Middle East peacemaking is their priority. By making it one of his, President Bush strengthens his ability to secure their support for his other priorities, especially vis-à-vis Iraq and Iran. Indeed, if the Administration is to succeed with any of its objectives, it will need to make allied cooperation on all of them an essential adjunct to its Middle East strategy.

**ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES**

Against this backdrop, the authors of the seven essays that follow have sought to craft policy approaches that will be both more effective than current policy at achieving U.S. goals in particular areas and more compatible with an integrated regional strategy. Three of the essays treat issues that cut across the region—the war on terror, Arab-Israeli peacemaking, and promoting reform. Four deal with U.S. policy toward critical countries in the region—Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia.

The essays begin with an examination of the requirements for a successful campaign against “Binladenism” by Shibley Telhami and James Steinberg. This essay takes as its point of departure the imperative to refocus the war on terror against a more dispersed threat. As Usama bin Laden has become less the leader of a particular organization and more the champion and figurehead for a radical Islamist ideology, it seems appropriate to define the enemy in the war on terror as “Binladenism.”

Refocusing the war on terror against Binladenism will entail not only the use of military force, but also the application of all elements of national power—intelligence, law enforcement, economic assistance, diplomacy, and public diplomacy—on a global basis. (It is striking that, in the Bush Administration’s 2002 National Security Strategy, the list of elements of national power that must be brought to bear in the war on terror does not include either diplomacy or public diplomacy.) Because of the increasingly devolved
nature of the threat, the global counterterrorism campaign is more likely to resemble a war of attrition on multiple fronts than a small number of comparatively surgical strikes against a single adversary.

Telhami and Steinberg argue that mounting this sort of campaign is going to require unprecedented levels of international cooperation, both globally and within the Arab and Muslim worlds. Their strategy focuses on establishing appropriate international and regional contexts for winning the degree of cooperation from other states that the United States needs to prevail in the fight against Binladenism. This approach has significant implications for macro-issues of foreign policy and international organization. It also underscores the importance of the way in which the United States conditions the regional context in the broader Middle East for its foreign-policy initiatives and pursues the battle for “hearts and minds” in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

Arguably, there is nothing more essential to building greater international and regional support for U.S. policy objectives and creating a more positive climate in the Arab and Muslim worlds for U.S. policy initiatives than more robust and effective U.S. engagement in Arab-Israeli peacemaking. As Telhami and Steinberg point out, the Arab-Israeli conflict has become the “prism of pain” through which most Arabs evaluate U.S. policy. Because of the centrality of this conflict to almost everything that the United States wants to accomplish in the broader Middle East, the second essay, by Martin Indyk, looks at the opportunities and risks for the Bush Administration in the Arab-Israeli arena.

For Indyk, successful U.S. engagement in promoting a final settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will require two things. First, the United States (and other international and regional players) will need to work hard to bolster a moderate, post-Arafat Palestinian leadership, through the holding of Palestinian elections, efforts to rebuild Palestinian capacity for governance, and the successful implementation of Prime Minister Sharon’s Gaza disengagement initiative. Second, the United States should, relatively early in the process, lay out a fuller vision for the “end game”—that is, the parameters for negotiating final-status issues, including borders, Jerusalem, and refugees—than the Bush Administration has heretofore been willing to offer. This is needed both to support the consolidation of a moderate Palestinian leadership and to lay the groundwork for a renewed political process.

Indyk lays out a comprehensive strategy for accomplishing these two steps, including recommendations on modalities (such as the appointment of a presidential envoy) and for the timing of specific initiatives. Beyond the Palestinian track, Indyk believes that the Bush Administration should also pay more attention to the possibility of reviving an Israeli-Syrian negotiating track than it did during its first term in office.

The third essay, by Tamara Cofman Wittes, deals with the promotion of reform in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Wittes makes a strong, interest-based argument for a forward-leaning American posture on both economic and political reform. In making concrete policy recommendations, she argues for a clear distinction between relatively urgent policy goals and goals that can prudently be achieved only on a gradual basis. She further lays out a framework identifying where to focus American efforts, and discusses how to handle the inevitable tradeoffs entailed in a policy of promoting reform.

The fourth essay, by Kenneth Pollack, treats the most immediately pressing foreign policy problem that President Bush faces in his second term—namely, the challenge of stabilizing post-Saddam Iraq. Pollack—an articulate prewar
champion of coercive regime change in Iraq—argues for a fundamental shift in the U.S. approach to reconstruction and political reconstitution there if the Bush Administration is to avoid a major policy failure.

More specifically, rather than continue down the path of post-conflict stabilization—which may have made sense in theory as the optimal approach for the United States in a post-Saddam environment, but which has been rendered unworkable by the unwillingness of the Administration to commit sufficient manpower and resources to secure all of Iraq—the president and his senior advisers need to move rapidly toward a genuine counterinsurgency strategy. This would mean not just a dramatic adjustment in the way that U.S. forces deploy and conduct themselves on the ground—focusing on creating enclaves in particular regions and slowly expanding outward, as opposed to trying to control the entire country—but also a radical change in the direction of economic reconstruction and political reconstitution.

The fifth and sixth essays, by Kenneth Pollack and Flynt Leverett, respectively, consider how the Bush Administration might deal more effectively with the two outstanding rogue states that Washington currently faces in the region: Iran and Syria. It is an open question whether the Bush Administration in its second term can develop workable strategies for getting Iran and Syria out of the terrorism business, rolling back (especially in the case of Iran) the WMD threats posed by these states, and enlisting their support for U.S. objectives in the region and in the struggle against violent jihadists. Neither Pollack nor Leverett believes that a strategy of coercive regime change, applied to Iran or Syria, would serve U.S. interests. Instead, accomplishing these goals is likely to require a fundamental shift in the Administration’s reluctance to engage regimes it considers, in many ways, morally illegitimate.

Pollack argues that the United States should be willing to pursue a “grand bargain” with the current leadership of the Islamic Republic if that proves possible, but should develop an alternative posture of “carrots-and-sticks” engagement with Tehran in order to induce modifications in problematic Iranian behaviors. Leverett argues that the United States can achieve a number of its most important policy goals toward Syria through a strategy of hard-nosed, “carrots-and-sticks” engagement with Damascus.

The final essay, also by Flynt Leverett, examines the challenges facing President Bush in managing America’s critical bilateral relationship with Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is, truly, “ground zero” in the war on terror and remains indispensable to America’s energy security for the foreseeable future. Unfortunately, since the September 11 attacks, the U.S.-Saudi relationship has gone through unprecedented strains. On both sides, voices arguing for a retrenchment in the two countries’ sixty-year strategic partnership are more prominent than ever before. Given the imperative of Saudi support for key U.S. policy objectives and the importance of preserving the kingdom’s long-term stability, the United States needs a strategy for dealing with Riyadh that improves the level of Saudi cooperation on important regional and energy issues while simultaneously encouraging genuine (if incremental) liberalization in the kingdom. In his first term, though, President Bush effectively left the U.S.-Saudi partnership drifting in post-9/11 winds. Leverett argues that the best way to reinvigorate this partnership is by combining more intensive bilateral engagement with the Saudi leadership with the establishment of a regional security framework for the Persian Gulf.

Thus, these essays seek to lay out alternative approaches to achieving the broad range of U.S. policy goals in the Middle East. The authors hope that, taken together, the essays also provide the
elements for a genuinely integrated strategic framework that will help decisionmakers manage both the changes and the continuities in America’s post-9/11 Middle East policy. The absence of such a framework in the past four years has weakened the efficacy of American foreign policy during a critically challenging time for U.S. interests. Hopefully, an informed discussion of policy alternatives may produce more satisfying outcomes during the next four years.
As the Bush Administration begins its second term, it faces the challenge of refocusing the global war on terror. The war on terror was originally presented, to American and foreign audiences, as the overarching framework for American foreign and national security policy in the post-9/11 world. However, as a conceptual and rhetorical device, it has become less useful (and potentially counterproductive) for this purpose as ever more diverse policy goals have been placed under its rubric and as its international legitimacy has declined following the intervention in Iraq. If these trends are not corrected in President Bush’s second term, there is a significant probability that the “war on terror” will ultimately become little more than a slogan to justify other foreign policy objectives and not a rallying point for gaining international support for U.S. actions.

Under current circumstances, refocusing the war on terror will necessarily entail two related shifts in U.S. policy. First, the definition of the objective of the war on terror has become too vague, making it imperative to specify more clearly the nature of the threat. Of course, the United States, as a matter of policy, opposes all terrorism, defined as the deliberate targeting of non-combatants for political purposes. But the threat to U.S. interests that emerged in such a high-profile fashion on September 11, 2001 is characterized not simply by means that a range of groups around the world employ, but also by a particular complex of aims, capabilities, and lack of responsiveness to traditional deterrence strategies.

By these criteria, America’s primary enemy in the post-9/11 world is most appropriately identified, not as “terrorism” in a generic sense, but as “Binladenism.”

- Obviously, Binladenism refers to al-Qa’ida; the term also refers to other groups that have come to embrace al-Qa’ida’s mission. From a strategic perspective, Binladenism is an international movement that aims to establish a puritanical Islamic order throughout the Arab and Muslim worlds, sees the United States as its principal enemy, and is empowered by transnational capabilities and a willingness to use any means available.

- Although Binladenism takes its name from the founder of al-Qa’ida, its orbit extends well beyond the limits of the al-Qa’ida organization...